

Washington - A recent report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs shows disabled veterans in Ohio are paid less than disabled veterans in any other state. Today Congressman Charlie Wilson (D-OH) sent a letter to the President asking him to make fixing this issue a top priority for the next Secretary of the Veterans Administration.

"I'm deeply concerned that Ohio's veterans are ranked dead last in the amount of money they receive for their disabilities," Wilson said.

Wilson invited the entire Ohio delegation to sign the letter. Six members joined Wilson in asking that the new VA Secretary make closing the gap a top priority. A copy of the letter follows:

8/1/2007

Dear President Bush,

As members of Ohio's Congressional Delegation, we were disturbed to learn that, according to a recent report commissioned by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Ohio ranks dead last in average payments made to disabled veterans. We respectfully request that you make ending this discrepancy a top priority as you make your decision to appoint a new Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

According to the report, this gap can be explained by the fact that in some states, the percentage of disabled veterans receiving maximum benefits is much higher than it is in other states. We do not believe that there is any natural reason for such large variation among states in the percentage of veterans receiving maximum awards. Further, we believe that this variation is the result of a lack of coordination and consistently applied standards that apply to all states.

We believe that there are several common-sense steps that the Department of Veterans Affairs can take without requiring legislative action. These steps include:

- Standardizing disability rating criteria and providing training to those responsible for rating veterans' disabilities. Currently, rating specialists do not receive such training, which allows considerable variation between states.

- Consolidating the disability rating process into one location. This would ensure that a consistent standard would apply to veterans across the nation.

- Increasing oversight of disability raters to ensure that they are applying standards consistently and fairly.

We believe that veterans in every state deserve a fair shake when their disabilities are evaluated. The new Secretary of Veterans Affairs must make closing the gap a top priority. By doing this, we believe that he or she can improve the lives of thousands of veterans who are not receiving the benefits that they deserve.

Thank you for taking our request into consideration. We look forward to working with you and the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs to resolve this issue.

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